

What is claimed is:

[Claim 1] A packaging system for shipping and displaying multiple layers of vertically stacked product containers, the system comprising: a plurality of layers of vertically stacked product containers as a structural component of the system; a plurality of trays, each tray comprising a center panel having an array of openings disposed therein for receiving and restricting the movement of the product containers, each tray further comprising corner openings for receiving vertical support posts; and vertical support posts inserted through the corner openings to lock the trays together.

[Claim 2] The packaging system of claim 1 further comprising a bottom tray on which rests a first level of product containers.

[Claim 3] The packaging system of claim 2 wherein the bottom tray comprises a center panel and short side panels extending upward from the center panel.

[Claim 4] The packaging system of claim 3 wherein the bottom tray rests on a pallet.

[Claim 5] The packaging system of claim 4 wherein each vertical support post has an upper end, the system further comprising a top cap configured to fit over upper ends of the vertical support posts.

[Claim 6] The packaging system of claim 5 wherein the top cap comprises a center panel and short side panels extending downward from the center panel.

[Claim 7] The packaging system of claim 6 further comprising banding disposed around the top cap and pallet to secure the system during shipping and handling.

[Claim 8] The packaging system of claim 7 further comprising plastic film disposed to protect the product containers from dust and damage.

[Claim 9] The packaging system of claim 8 wherein the vertical support posts are hollow tubes.

[Claim 10] The packaging system of claim 1 wherein each tray is formed from corrugated board.

[Claim 11] The packaging system of claim 1 wherein each tray further comprises side panels extending perpendicularly from the periphery of the center panel.

[Claim 12] The packaging system of claim 11 wherein the tray side panels are decorated for consumer appeal.

[Claim 13] The packaging system of claim 1 wherein each product container has a top and a bottom and wherein each tray rests on the tops of a layer of product containers.

[Claim 14] The packaging system of claim 13 wherein the product containers have a larger diameter at the top than at the bottom and wherein the openings in the tray center panel are larger than the bottoms of the product containers but smaller than the tops of the product containers.